

# What One Man Did For "Newsies"

## The Story of a Unique Club House at Toledo, Ohio



These illustrations show John E. Gunckel of Toledo, O., and the club house he was instrumental in building for the newsboys of that city; also the famous newsboys' band of Toledo and a group of newsboys at the dedication of the building recently.

By F. M. HOPKINS

**S**AY, Gunck, do you really mean that this swimming pool is for us kids? That we can go diving and splashin' around in the water there without any clothes on and not have any copper come along and pinch us? That we can fool around them circus performance things all we want to and climb up on the trapeze and skin the cat?"

"Three cheers for Gunck and all the rest of their fellers who put up the coin to give us kids all this stuff."

Such was the conversation heard not less than 600 times by John E. Gunckel, the "father" of newsboys, at the time of the recent dedication of the newsboys' \$100,000 club building in Toledo, the only one of its kind in the entire country.

That the little street merchants appreciate their new home is shown plainly in the fact that when the little fellows, many of them orphans and some of them worse than orphans, owing to the squalor of their homes, are not selling papers on the street, they can be found reading in the club library, playing games in the entertainment room, swimming in the pool or engaged in the numerous other diversions provided for their pleasure and betterment.

**A**LL this began at Christmas time, 1892, when Commodore John E. Gunckel, then an official of the Lake Shore & Michigan Southern railroad, gathered together a company of 102 newsboys, the worst types that could be found, and with the assistance of several other citizens of Toledo treated them to a Christmas dinner.

It was an unruly crowd that gathered around the tables. History records that seven policemen were present to try to keep order. There were three fights and several near-scrimmages and before the assemblage was dispersed finally one of the policemen was thrown bodily out of the hall by a bunch of the newsies, who seriously objected to the bluecoat interfering with them in the settlement of their differences.

In spite of the belligerency, the Toledo Newsboys' Association was formed then and there. The association numbers 6,439 members, of whom 2,100 are active. Once a member, always a member.

In interesting contrast to that 1892 dinner it is worthy to note that when the annual field day and outing was held last August, 2,000 newsboys at-

tended and there wasn't a policeman within seventeen miles. In all that big crowd there was no fighting, no swearing, no ungentlemanly conduct, and some of the officers of the association who were present and assisted in maintaining order were of the original 102.

All of this has been accomplished through the honor system installed by John E. Gunckel.

In order to become a member, a newsboy signs a card specifying that he will TRY to abstain from swearing, stealing, lying, cheating and smoking cigarettes.

He is then given a badge, which is numbered, and his name placed in the roll book.

Mr. Gunckel's lieutenants, who are newsboys, then do the rest.

Should that member just enrolled be found doing any of the things he says he will try to overcome, he is cautioned by one of the helpers; if it occurs again he is reported and his badge, the pride of the newsies, is taken away from him and he is put on probation; his comrades see that he is held up to scorn and records prove that it is not long before an effort is made by the suspended member to become a member again in good standing.

**W**ORK is done almost entirely through newsboys themselves, and Mr. Gunckel, the president of the association, is called rarely into play other than to advise his lieutenants.

There is not a nationality that is not represented in the association, and it is a case of equal rights for all regardless of creed or color.

The building just recently dedicated was erected as a monument to the good work of John E. Gunckel, and was made possible through the voluntary contributions of thousands of citizens. School children contributed their mite and the newsboys themselves worked overtime to secure a few cents to add to the fund.

The structure has a frontage of 75 feet with a depth of 165 feet. It is virtually three stories high, although the front elevation shows but two. What is regarded as the crowning feature is the beautiful auditorium, which affords space for 1,137 opera chairs, a completed and handsomely equipped stage and dressing rooms. In this auditorium much is done to plant good seed, develop self-control and to mould character.

Sunday is the day of days for the newsies and the building swarms with them. On this day the week's big entertainment is given.

The principal body is divided into five auxiliaries made up of boys living in various sections of the city. Each auxiliary takes turn in furnishing the program for the Sunday afternoon performance, and each tries to outclass all the rest.

Two numbers on the program can be filled by outsiders—whoever the boys desire to have address them. The rest of the dozen turns must be furnished by members of the organization—recita-

tions, musical numbers of all kinds, clog dances, whistling stunts, acrobatic performances, drills, monologues and almost every other kind of a turn that is known to the theatrical profession.

The addresses by the outsiders as a rule are heart to heart talks with the boys, spoken in a way that the boys can understand; in such a way that just a kernel or two may find fertile soil. If the speaker is able to use a little of the street talk in his address he is assured of a friendly spot in the boys' hearts.

Applause is the long suit of the boys, providing a thing suits them, and if it doesn't, woe be unto the performer, for he must be content with retiring to the background with but a faint ripple of applause.

**W**HEN "Gunck" appears—ah, then there is order.

There was a time when there was not. All that is necessary to secure absolute quiet is the appearance of their Gunck at one of their meetings, his left hand half raised. For they honor Gunck, revere him and respect his wishes and never has he been known to have received an unkind word from his thousands of newsboys.

"Cut that out, or I'll tell Gunck on you," is the retort often made by one newsy to another who may be trespassing close to the forbidden line. That is sufficient and it is "cut out."

The offices and well stocked library of the building have been arranged with all due regard to the convenience of President Gunckel, who a year and a half ago was induced to give up his position with the Lake Shore railroad and devote his entire time to the Newsboys association. Fifty of the leading citizens pledged themselves to give a certain amount each year toward Gunckel's salary and after much protestation on the part of the railroad company, Mr. Gunckel resigned and is now devoting his entire time to the upbuilding of the citizens of tomorrow.

**F**URNITURE that no boy can break, that of the mission style, predominates throughout the entire building. As one little newsy expressed it when his eyes first feasted on it: "Look, kids, here's tables and things made out of straight wood and none uv it has any bowlegs."

But after all it is in the basement where the street merchants seem to enjoy themselves the most, for it is there that the swimming pool, gymnasium and dining room are located.

The gymnasium has a complete set of wall and floor apparatus, donated by the wife of one of the trustees. Back of the gymnasium is the natatorium and shower baths, where the lads are free from the clutches of the law and can "stay in" as long as they like, clothed in nature's own garb.

Statistics compiled by city authorities in years gone by show that most of the drownings in the Maumee river at this point have been newsboys who have undertaken to face the strong current in the river. It is expected that fatalities will be decreased and the lives of many of the newsies will be saved this summer.

In the basement also is located the kitchen, with an eight-foot range, steam table, cooking utensils

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